Shakeup at FBI Denied by Kelley

By Jerry Oppenheimer
Washington Star Staff Writer

FBI Director Clarence M. Kelley denied yesterday that the retirement of two high-ranking officials who were active in the bureau's controversial domestic spying program was the result of a shakeup in the agency.

"Some speculation has been voiced that they left because of a shakeup," Kelley said in an interview, "but nothing could be further from the truth."

Kelley praised W. Raymond Wannall and William A. Branigan for having served the FBI "honorably and competently" for more than 34 years.

THE DIRECTOR said he accepted their recent retirement requests "reluctantly," adding that "I and my associates would have very much liked to have them remain. They left because this was an opportune time both from the standpoint of the advantage to their pensions and to enable them to spend more time with their families."

Wannall, 57, served as assistant director of the intelligence division and Branigan, 59, was chief of the espinoage section of the intelligence division.

Certain of the FBI's domestic intelligence operations have come under sharp criticism from congressional investigators. The General Accounting Office recently released a report questioning the need and legimitacy of domestic investigations.

AN INVESTIGATION by the Senate Intelligence Committee found evidence that the bureau provoked riots, engaged in break-ins and other alleged criminal acts in its counterintelligence program, or COINTELPRO, which began in 1954 and ended in 1971.

Kelley said that none of the blame for those activites could be placed on either Wannall or Branigan.

"The responsibility," he asserted, "rests on those who ordered the investigations. I cannot now say who should be held ultimately responsible but certainly these two men cannot be held responsible for any possible illegality."

KELLEY DISCLOSED that Wannall will be succeeded by Wannall's "number one man," Thomas W. Leavitt, 50, who joined the bureau in February 1951 in a clerical capacity. Leavitt, the father of seven, served as a special agent in charge of the Columbia, S.C., and New Haven field offices prior to being designated as inspector-deputy assistant director of the intelligence division in August 1974.

Kelley said no decision on Branigan's replacement as head of the espionage section has been made and that no changes are contemplated "so far as our emphasis on espionage and foreign intellignece gathering is concerned."

In the controversial domestic intelligence area, Kelley said that since 1973 "we have reduced the caseload about 64 percent and this was acheived under the supervision of Mr. Wannall."

The director said the guidelines being drawn up by the Justice Department "will determine to a great extent what the FBI's activity will be in the domestic intelligence field."

CLARENCE KELLEY
Praise for the departing